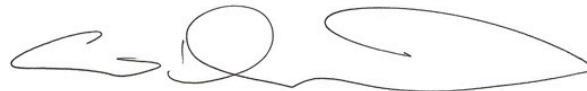


GHOST STORIES: WRITING POLITICAL MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a work of creative scholarship, meaning it is both a research and creative project. The first part of the thesis takes a look at political autobiographies and memoirs, and the second part contains a series of creative pieces that attempt to satirize many of the elements examined in the first part.

I focus specifically on four presidential autobiographies and memoirs, among other examples of political memory writing. I also examine the business of ghostwriting, and how it plays into political memory writing. I then use the research section of the thesis as a springboard for the short pieces that follow in the creative section.

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PART I

The Research Part

Chapter 1

Autobiography vs. Memoir Writing and the Works of Presidents

Ulysses S. Grant, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush

“The Andover dean, G. Grenville Benedict, was a realist. He advised that I ‘get some good insurance’ in case Yale didn’t work out. I applied to another good school, the University of Texas at Austin, and toured the campus with Dad. I started to picture myself there as part of an honors program called Plan Two. [sic]” — George W. Bush, *Decision Points*

Memoir and autobiography are sometimes used as synonyms for each other, but the two genres are actually quite different. In the realm of personal narrative writing, they share many similar elements and are, therefore often conflated. However, at a basic level, autobiography chronicles the writer’s entire life, while memoir tends to recount specific moment in the writer’s life.¹ This thesis takes a look at four post-presidential narratives—two memoirs, by Ulysses S. Grant and George W. Bush, and two autobiographies, by Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

¹ "Memoir vs. Autobiography." *WritersDigest.com*. N.p., 09 May 2013. Web.

Autobiography became a more mainstream genre in the 18th and 19th centuries. There was more of a demand from the public to read about influential individuals.² As printing grew cheaper, due the rise of the printing press, those in the public eye became increasingly scrutinized. The roots of celebrity life and portrayal began to take hold. At this point, public figures were expected to write about their own lives. However, these autobiographies were expected to go beyond simple chronologies of the person's life. They were expected to contain insights on the individual's emotions and provide human context for the various events surrounding their lives.³

Fiction also began taking on nonfictional elements. For example, Charles Dickens incorporated many autobiographical facts into his stories, and characters became extensions of his life and personality. Further evolution yielded a new subgenre of fiction known as "fictional autobiography".⁴ Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* falls under this genre. The novel, whose full title was *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to Publish on Any Account)*. Like Dickens, was a parody of the new autobiography genre. I also intend to have some fun with the genre. The fictional presidential autobiography

² Anderson, Linda R. *Autobiography*. London: Routledge, 2001. 9.

³ Anderson, *Autobiography*. 15.

⁴ Anderson, *Autobiography*. 17.

I present later will be modeled after the four autobiographies and memoirs discussed in this chapter.

Memoirs can begin anywhere in the author's life. They don't necessarily have to begin with the author's childhood or family background. The story can jump around from moment to moment, as well. Different eras in a person's life can be jumbled together, and the narrative can jump between time and place. Memoirs can also be organized in more creative ways since they don't have to follow strict chronological order. George Bush's book is an example of the thematic structure. So is Ulysses S. Grant's, where he focuses on key events in the Civil War.

Grant's work consists of a series of vignettes that take place during the Civil War. The collection is organized somewhat chronologically, though, so it can read like an autobiography. For example, like the autobiographies of Clinton and Bush, Grant's opens up with his family genealogy and his upbringing. It lays out his childhood and provides personal anecdotes growing up in Ohio.⁵ While memoir writing tends to focus on specific events, Grant's opening chapters are encyclopedic, in that he provides a series of chronological facts regarding his upbringing

⁵ Grant, Ulysses S. *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant: Complete and Unabridged*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006. 10.

and family background.⁶ Reagan and Clinton write similarly in their autobiographies.

While post-presidential autobiographies are ostensibly written by one person—the president who is the author—presidential narrative writing is actually quite collaborative. A team of consultants and ghostwriters interact with the work and craft the ultimate product. For example, Mark Twain was the main driving force behind Grant's personal memoirs.⁷ Twain saw a lucrative opportunity to capitalize on General Grant's experience in the Civil War, and he was right. Grant was a popular president and a decorated Civil War general who had riveting war stories to tell. He was also in a dire financial situation and had numerous medical ailments, so he also needed the extra income.⁸ For his personal memoirs, Grant did not want to include anything about his presidential administration. He chose to concentrate completely on the Civil War.⁹ The American public was engrossed by the finished product, and his book has gone on to serve as the quintessential example for post-presidential narrative writing.

⁶ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*. 1-27.

⁷ Kevin L. Jones, *American Post-presidential Memoirs and Autobiographies: Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography, and Jimmy Carter's Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, Diss, 2011, N.p.: n.p., n.d, Print.10-15

⁸ Jones, *American Post-presidential Memoirs and Autobiographies*. 15.

⁹ Grant, *Personal Memoirs*. 16-17.

George Bush's memoir *Decision Points* takes after Grant's memoir. Bush even states in his introduction that he read Grant's memoir to prepare for writing his own memoir.¹⁰ Like Grant's memoirs, Bush constructed his book around personal anecdotes, and he focused on key moments in his life. While Grant mostly concentrated on stories from the Civil War, Bush focused on key decision points during his administration, hence the title, *Decision Points*. Each chapter centers on just one key moment he faced while president, and the chapter titles reflect that. For example, "Afghanistan," "Iraq," and "Financial Crisis" are chapters that deal precisely with the titles.¹¹

Even though Bush concentrates on specific facets of his presidency, he still sprinkles stories from other moments of his life when he wasn't president—whether it's a story about organizing a stickball league in grade school, or being arrested after a Princeton-Yale football game.¹² He is also incredibly candid throughout the book. For example, he is open about his alcoholism and about his poor grades throughout grade school and college.¹³ Similarly, Bill Clinton is very open in his

¹⁰ Bush, George W. *Decision Points*. New York: Crown, 2010. xi-xii.

¹¹ Bush, *Decision Points*. "Table of Contents".

¹² Bush, *Decision Points*. 10.

¹³ Bush, *Decision Points*. 20.

autobiography about his shortcomings as both a president and a family man.¹⁴

Discussion of post-presidential narrative writing should also include a broader analysis of autobiography and memoir as literary genres. Autobiography has existed as its own distinct genre since the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Literary critic Philippe Lejeune notes that autobiography can be defined as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality.”¹⁶ The development Lejeune refers to in the last part of his definition most aptly applies to post-presidential narrative writing. At the end of the day, these books are about developing and shaping the president’s legacy.

Bill Clinton’s *My Life* is a great example of an autobiography. In over 900 pages, he packs as many details about his life as possible. It chronicles his whole life from growing up in Hope, Arkansas, to his college years to his life after his presidency. The distribution of pages to different sections of his life is worth noting. For example, he recounts his entire upbringing from childhood to college in fewer than seventy pages, leaving around 900 pages about his political career, starting with his job

¹⁴ Bill, Clinton. *My Life Bill Clinton*. NY: Random House, 2004. 14.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Autobiography*. 22.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Autobiography*. 25.

under Senator J.W. Fulbright while he was an undergraduate at Georgetown University.¹⁷

He also wrote the book himself. Unlike previous presidents who relied on ghostwriters, Clinton spent over two years to write the huge opus.¹⁸ In fact, he handwrote the entire first draft. The original manuscript was contained within “twenty-two big, thick notebooks.”¹⁹ While Clinton committed himself to the grunt work of handwriting thousands of pages of personal testimony, he also had the help of his senior advisor Justin Cooper, who was his main editor. In an interview with David Letterman, Clinton noted, “I wrote it out long hand, left blanks for research, he'd [Cooper] do the research, put it in the computer, print it out, and then we'd edit it”, Clinton said. “Every page in this book has probably been gone over somewhere between three and nine times.”²⁰ Even President Bush once quipped that the autobiography was “10,000 pages or something.”²¹

On the other hand, Ronald Reagan’s autobiography is an example of a post-presidential work that was completely ghostwritten. Reagan had

¹⁷ Clinton, *My Life*. 27.

¹⁸Revolvy, LLC. “My Life (Bill Clinton Autobiography).” *All Revolvvy Quizzes*. N.p., n.d. Web.

¹⁹ “The Late Show with David Letterman.” *Bill Clinton Interview*. CBS. 3 Aug. 2004. Television. Transcript.

²⁰ “The Late Show with David Letterman.” *Bill Clinton Interview*. CBS. 3 Aug. 2004. Television. Transcript.

²¹Bush, George W. “Remarks by President Bush at the 2007 Radio and Television Correspondents’ Dinner.” Radio and Television Correspondents’ Annual Dinner. Speech.

little, if any, involvement with the work. At a press conference for the book's release, Reagan joked, "I hear it's a terrific book! One of these days I'm going to read it myself."²² The autobiography's main author was Reagan's close aide Robert Lindsey, who seems to expertly capture Reagan's voice. He strings together a series of personal anecdotes, speeches, and asides. Like any other post-presidential autobiography, the book attempts to take an honest survey of Reagan's administration and presents both its high points and low points—from the Iran-Contra scandal to bringing down the Berlin Wall. However, it is quite apparent that the book is trying to maintain Reagan's starched and courtly image. For example, Lindsey will censor any swear word that appears in Reagan's diary entries, even the most innocuous curses like "damn" and "hell."²³

One anecdote from *An American Life* that particularly stands out—especially the fact that the autobiography was ghostwritten—is when Reagan describes his experience as a fresh-faced actor who just moved to Hollywood. He was sitting at a table with studio executives as they brainstormed stage names for him. They were also figuring out what to do about his "small head." The solution was for him to widen his collars and

²²Trex, Ethan, CNN.com. "Fun Facts about Presidential Memoirs." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 20 Sept. 2010. Web.

²³ Reagan, Ronald. *An American Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990. 102.

to tie his ties with wide Windsor knots. "Ignoring me, they'd suggest a name, rule it out, then start over again, getting nowhere," he writes. "Finally I interrupted and they looked at me as if I'd done something wrong. The mannequin could speak."²⁴ This encounter exemplifies the tedious work of scrutinizing every last detail to present a certain image and character. That was the case of his acting career, his presidency, and even his autobiography. Reagan was the mannequin on which teams of advisors, aides, and ghostwriters meticulously fashioned their version of an American president.

Ghostwritten autobiographies bring up interesting questions about authorship. What does it mean for an autobiography to be ghostwritten if, by definition, an autobiography is "a history of a person's life written or told by that person"?²⁵ An autobiography that is written by someone else turns out to be more of a biography that is written in the first person.

When looking at post-presidential narrative writing, it's important to consider intention.²⁶ Ultimately, the question boils down to: "What is the intention of the author?" Intention helps link the gap between author, narrator, and protagonist. All three are bundled up in

²⁴ Reagan, *An American Life*. 23-25.

²⁵ "The Definition of Autobiography." *Dictionary.com*. N.p., n.d. Web.

²⁶ Anderson, *Autobiography*. 31.

autobiography and memoir writing, so they are difficult to tell apart when analyzing the literature.

One must consider intentionality when reading a presidential memoir or autobiography. Is the author trying to revise history, or is he trying to perpetuate a certain image? Bush's memoir could be seen as an attempt to palliate a highly controversial presidency. Reagan's autobiography can be seen as an attempt to maintain a specific character that the American public has gotten to know. At the end of the day, political memoirs and autobiographies are works of propaganda and they are meant to shape historical narrative and preserve a certain legacy.

Chapter 2

The Business of Ghostwriting

The term *ghostwriting* was coined in 1921 by Christy Walsh, who established an organization of ghostwriters called the Christy Walsh Syndicate.²⁷ He primarily ghostwrote for a number of sports clients like Babe Ruth and Bill Tilden. One ghost in Walsh's syndicate named Damon Runyon laid out the two rules a ghostwriter must always follow. Rule number one is: "Don't insult the intelligence of the public by claiming these men write their own stuff."²⁸ And rule number two is: "all ghosts must be in daily communication with their *bodies*."²⁹ Walsh elaborated on the role of the ghostwriter by saying, "A new ghost writer has to learn a lot about style," adding, "He usually makes the mistake of thinking that he ought to write the way his celebrity talks. That is an error. He ought to write the way the public thinks his celebrity talks."

It doesn't matter what the ostensible author actually believes, if the book reflects the public's perception of the person, then the goal is accomplished. Walsh's view is an interesting take on what it means to be a public figure. Memoir and autobiography emerged as literary genres because the public wanted to glimpse into the inner lives and workings of

²⁷ Adams, Tim. "Tim Adams on the Honourable Art of Ghostwriting." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media, 18 Mar. 2006. Web.

²⁸ Adams, "Tim Adams on the Honourable Art of Ghostwriting." *The Guardian*.

²⁹ Adams, "Tim Adams on the Honourable Art of Ghostwriting." *The Guardian*.

public figures. However, the public already knows how they want to view the public figure. Even though the public wants to learn more about the individual, the public is actually interested in being validated for what they already believe to be true.

So, according to Walsh, the ghostwriter's job is to connect the public figure with what the public already wants to read. This is an interesting dynamic because, at that point, is there anything new being revealed about the individual? It also raises the question: who is the ghostwriter really serving—the client who commissioned the work, or the public? Walsh would know a thing or two about what it means to be a successful ghostwriter. Most of what he learned about ghostwriting happened while he was working for Babe Ruth. With Ruth, he wrote three volumes for him as part of an autobiographical series and made a lot of money out of it.

However, contrary to Damon Runyon's first rule of ghostwriting which goes, "Don't insult the intelligence of the public by claiming these men write their own stuff,"³⁰ most people today don't even know when they're reading a book that has been written by ghostwriters. For example, Hillary Clinton's memoir *It Takes a Village*, which was a bestseller in 1996, had her name as the sole author of the book, though

³⁰ Adams, "Tim Adams on the Honourable Art of Ghostwriting." *The Observer*.

that wasn't necessarily the case. A Georgetown lecturer named Barbara Feinman Todd later revealed that she was the true writer of the book.³¹ She spent seven months writing the book, yet her name was credited nowhere, not even in the acknowledgements. Not only does "It Takes a Village" refer to the title of the book, but it also refers to how many people it took to ghostwrite the book.

Ghostwriters don't always go uncredited; though, they aren't necessarily credited as coauthors. Many times the people who actually write the book appear in the acknowledgements section of the book as "consultants," "aides," and "friends." In Hillary Clinton's more recent book, *Hard Choices*, her ghostwriters are listed in one of the last few pages near the end of the volume. Her "book team," as she called her team of writers, consisted of Dan Schwerin, a State Department aide; Ethan Gelber, another State Department aide; and Ted Widmer, a historian from Brown University.³² However, their exact contributions are not specified.

In a more transparent example, Malcolm X's ghostwriter appears alongside his name on the book cover. Through contractual agreement, Alex Haley pushed for his name to be credited as a coauthor.³³ Haley,

³¹Farhi, Paul. "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 9 June 2014. Web.

³² Clinton, Hillary Rodham. *Hard Choices*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 597.

³³ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

who later went on to write the bestseller, *Roots*, even appeared in the book's subtitle: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X as Told to Alex Haley*.

There is no real way of knowing if the book you are reading is ghostwritten. In most of these books, the client's name is the sole author that graces the book cover. John F. Kennedy, when he was then a senator, famously won a Pulitzer Prize for his bestselling book *Profiles in Courage*. The book is a volume of short biographies about eight different senators in the Senate's history. But it was later revealed that he was not the sole author of the book. He, in fact, received help from his chief speechwriter Ted Sorensen and Jacqueline Kennedy's history instructor from Georgetown University Jules David.³⁴

In 1957, acclaimed journalist Drew Pearson said during an interview with ABC's Mike Wallace that "John F. Kennedy is the only man in history that I know who won a Pulitzer Prize for a book that was ghostwritten for him."³⁵ The Kennedy family subsequently went to ABC and requested for Wallace and Pearson to retract their words and put out an apology, or else they would sue the network for \$50 million.³⁶ But Wallace and Pearson refused to do so, defending what they said to be

³⁴ Tofel, Richard J. "Jackie Kennedy's Flawed Memory." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 23 Sept. 2011. Web.

³⁵ "The Mike Wallace Interview." *The Mike Wallace Interview with Drew Pearson*. ABC. 7 Dec. 1957. Television. Transcript.

³⁶ Wallace, Mike, and Gary Paul Gates. "Between You and Me" *New York Times First Chapter*. The New York Times, 22 Jan. 2006. Web.

true. ABC ended up issuing the apology on behalf of the network, which infuriated Wallace and Pearson.³⁷

For decades, questions regarding Kennedy's involvement in the book remained. But in 2008, Sorenson conceded in his own autobiography, *Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History* that he (Sorenson) "did a first draft of most chapters"³⁸ and "helped choose the words of many of its sentences,"³⁹ which, some would argue, is the very definition of writing a book. Sorenson is an example of a ghostwriter remaining true and loyal to his client to the very end. Side note, there is no indication in Sorenson's autobiography if he received ghost help in writing his book.

With Sorenson's semi-confession, *Profiles in Courage* ended up being a book of biographies whose true biographer was a ghostwriter. Sorenson, in this case, is the middleman between the men who were written about and the purported man writing about them. Therefore, the senators who were written about in the book are one step removed from the true biographer and two steps removed from the perceived biographer. John F. Kennedy, whose name gets to grace the cover, basks in all the literary glory, and the subsequent fame that came with it—which helped further advance his political career.

³⁷ Wallace & Gates, "Between You and Me" *New York Times First Chapter*

³⁸ Sorenson, Theodore C. *Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History*. New York, NY: Harper, 2008. 144.

³⁹ Sorenson, *Counselor*. 146.

It's not unusual that readers hardly ever know if the book they're reading was written by a team of writers as opposed to one author. Ghostwriters typically sign non-disclosure agreements that bar them from divulging information about the writing process.⁴⁰ For this reason, readers will never be able to know if what they are reading was born out of collaboration or not.

That being said, it is not fair to claim that people hire ghostwriters out of laziness. As Mark Sullivan, owner of Manhattan Literary, a ghostwriting firm in New York City, put it, "Books are a huge amount of work. It takes a lot of experience. Some very capable people want books written but don't have the time or the expertise to do it."⁴¹ In other words, books take a lot of time to write, and the iconic people who the public wants to read autobiographies about don't have the time to set aside for it. That's time that they could be spending doing the things that make them iconic, so the argument goes. There is, thus, a booming business in writing the books for them.

Manhattan Literary will charge a base price of \$15,000 per book, but some books, like celebrity bestsellers, can net up to \$500,000 for the ghostwriter.⁴² The clients who ghostwriters really want to work for are

⁴⁰ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

⁴¹ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

⁴² Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

celebrities and athletes. As ghostwriter Kevin Anderson puts it, these are the people with “incredible life stories but weak writing skills.”⁴³

Ghostwriters usually stay in the shadows of their work while the client gets to claim full authorship. Sometimes, clients will play into the illusion of authorship and share details about the writing process as if they were actually the true authors. They might even convince themselves of the illusion. Ivana Trump once hired a ghostwriter for \$350,000 to write a novel for her about her Czech alter ego named Katrina.⁴⁴ However, she pretended to be the actual author. In once bizarre interview, she noted, “To my surprise, I find I have a great imagination. I don’t say I’m the Shakespeare, but it’s not just about the beautiful people and the gorgeous yachts and the fabulous homes and lots of sex. I tried to put in more the feelings [*sic*].”⁴⁵

Is it okay to pass off work as if it’s somebody else’s? Passing off somebody else’s work as your own is a huge no-no for students in college. If caught, a student could face failing grades and perhaps even academic discipline. Does ghostwriting fall under the same category? Professional ghostwriters will argue that even though they play significant roles in the writing process, the client is still the true author.

⁴³ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

⁴⁴ Adams, "Tim Adams on the Honourable Art of Ghostwriting." *The Guardian*.

⁴⁵ Hitt, Jack. "The Writer Is Dead." *Books in Brief*. The New York Times, 25 Mar. 1997.

As Kevin Anderson frames it, “The content, ideas and concepts for ghostwritten books come directly from the client. A ghostwriter is an interpreter and a translator, not an author, which is why our clients deserve full credit for authoring their books.”⁴⁶ At the end of the day, ghostwriting is a business. It also provides writers an opportunity to make some good money while still honing their craft. As Mark Sullivan puts it, “I think of this as a business. It’s not blood diamonds out of Sierra Leone.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

⁴⁷ Farhi, "Who Actually Wrote That Political Memoir?" *The Washington Post*.

PART II

The Creative Part

Chapter 3

My Life: An Autobiography of a President

By President Bill F. Jennings⁴⁸

This is an excerpt from the first chapter of President Bill F. Jennings's post-presidential autobiography.

My Life is an autobiography about my life, and nobody else's life. It is not to be confused with Bill Clinton's *My Life*, which is about his life. This book is also in no way affiliated with *My Life* by Golda Meir. *My Life*, which is about her life, recounts her upbringing and path to becoming the first female Prime Minister of Israel while *My Life*, which is about my life, recounts my upbringing and path to becoming the 46th President of the United States. This book is also in no way related to *My Life*—the autobiography of Australian cricket player Brett Lee. Nor is it related to *My Life*, the autobiography of Leon Trotsky, who was a communist. I am not a communist, if that wasn't already clear. I'm sorry for any confusion; I just want to clarify that this book has nothing to do with their lives. If you come across any other books with the title *My Life*, just peak at the book jacket, and if you don't see my face then that means the book isn't about me. This book only pertains to my life, hence the title *My Life*.

⁴⁸ Ghostwritten by John Lowenthal

Usually presidents wait until after their presidencies to write their memoirs. But for me, the writing process started long before I was even elected. One can say that I began writing this before I even knew how to write. The mere act of living was in itself writing.

I would like to acknowledge a few people who made *My Life* possible. I would like to thank my friend John Lowenthal who helped me put together the research for *My Life*. And of course none of this would have ultimately been possible without my mom and dad. Without them, *my life* wouldn't have even been possible.

I've had dreams of being the President of the United States since I was six years old. As a six year old I remember thinking, "You know what? This country has gone down the toilet. America needs a leader who won't play by the normal rules of Washington. This country deserves better." I knew this country was going down the wrong path five decades before I even ascended office. In the five decades leading up to my eventual inauguration, I have been preparing for the greatest duty of my life. My story is the country's story, and the country's story is my story. History is *his story* (my story).

I will say, though, one of the most surprising things I realized about the presidency is that it is a job that lets you work from home, but quite literally. I had never really thought about it until my first day in office, which is technically a home office. Being able to live *and* work in the White House was the biggest perk of the job. Though, it could also be

somewhat distracting. One minute I would be hanging in the East Room watching TV in my boxers, and the next minute I'd be summoned to the Situation Room right down the hall to negotiate the liberation of American hostages. The description for the Office of the President boils down to this: you get to work from home, the hours are flexible, and you get to travel every once in awhile. This is what I got to do as the leader of the free world.

Chapter 4

My Life: An Autobiography of a Ghostwriter

By John Lowenthal, Ghostwriter of *My Life: An Autobiography of a President*

The following is an excerpt from the first chapter of Lowenthal's autobiography.

This is about my life. This has nothing to do with anyone else's life. God, I really hate this title. When people title their autobiographies *My Life* there is absolutely no way to tell whose life you're talking about. If you are a person who has lived a life, and you've written a book about said life, chances are that you've titled your autobiography *My Life*. You know how many autobiographies I've ghostwritten titled *My Life*? Twenty-four. Twenty-four books titled *My Life*—none of them pertaining to my own life. So with my autobiography, I'm reclaiming the title *My Life* by making it about my actual life.

I had always wanted to be a writer, but at some point I had to start making my own money. I had bills to pay and groceries to buy, so the only way I saw myself being able to make a living writing was by becoming a writer-for-hire. My career as a ghostwriter began beneath another ghostwriter. I was a ghostwriter's apprentice. I worked for the famous ghostwriter Bernard Mann. "Famous" probably isn't the right word, because you have likely never heard of the man—a good ghostwriter stays out of the public eye. Though, you probably have heard

of the hundreds of people he has ghostwritten for—Joe DiMaggio, Madeleine Albright, Paris Hilton, you name it. Bern Mann, as we called him, was likely behind their books.

He was at the top of the leader board for books titled *My Life*. He authored a total of fifty-seven (57) autobiographies and memoirs titled *My Life*—a record among ghostwriters. He also had countless volumes titled *A Life*, *This Life*, and *An American Life*. Bernard knew Czech, Italian, and Mandarin, so he even authored books for a number of international dignitaries and celebrities. Among his many international titles, he had *České Život (A Czech Life)*, *Una Vita Italiana (An Italian Life)*, and 意大利生活 (the Mandarin translation of *An Italian Life* that Bern Mann translated himself.)

As a ghostwriter's apprentice, I was tasked with doing much of the research and writing, which means I sometimes I functioned as a ghostwriter to the ghostwriter. I was a ghost-ghostwriter, if you will. However, it wasn't uncommon for ghostwriters to have ghostwriters. Big time bestsellers usually employ large teams of ghostwriters, and you would never even know. The name on the front cover of a book suggests there's one author. Not only is there likely more than one author, but if a ghostwriter is credited in the book, more likely than not, he or she isn't even the real ghostwriter.

Near the end of his life, Bernard set out to write his own autobiography. He intended to write about his long life writing about the

lives of others in his book *My Life*. But he ended up dying before completing it, and I took up the task of finishing it myself. So technically I ended up ghostwriting a portion of his autobiography. Published posthumously, *My Life* by Bernard Mann was finished from the grave, and I functioned as a narrative conduit for his ghost.

It's not that I always wanted to be a ghostwriter. I think if I had the chance, I would have wanted to live a life worth writing about, not be the one doing the writing. While I may never go down in history as a figure with historical significance, I might at least go as a footnote, or acknowledgement in history, when the great men and women I've ghostwritten for are remembered.

It's more than simply writing biographies in the first person. Ghostwriting enables a trade off between the writer and client. The client will get all the praise and fame from the book's publishing, but the writer gets to feel as if he's writing about his own life. I could never be a president. I could never be a celebrity or public figure. But, with ghostwriting, I can be whomever I want to be. Getting assigned to write about the life of a president, or of a billionaire software tycoon, has allowed me to feel like an actual president or billionaire software tycoon.

When I wrote President Bill F. Jennedy's autobiography, it was as if I was the one who was actually in the White House. But given that it was President Jennedy, I also felt incredibly shameful, as he will no doubt go down as one of the worst presidents in American history. I

couldn't help but also feel intense guilt helping whitewash his terrible legacy. When writing about his shortsighted foreign policy, I couldn't help but feel like I was the one making these incredibly ill-advised decisions. I felt like I was the one who signed off on the disastrous drone strikes and arms deals. Even though I'm technically not the real President Bill F. Jennedy, I was him while writing *My Life* (his book.) I couldn't help but internalize the incompetence.

In the period I wrote Jennedy's *My Life*, I found myself acting and thinking just like him. For example, the same way he went on cocaine benders in college, I also attempted a few cocaine benders just to see what that was like. I was Jennedy, minus the fact that I was ever elected to office, or came from a long line of rich and handsome Anglo Saxons.

Even though Bill F. Jennedy will go down as one of the worst presidents in American history, I won't necessarily go down as one of the worst ghostwriters in history. As a ghostwriter, I jump around from human vessel to human vessel, and I'm not judged for the actions of the people for whom I write. However, as someone who shapes their legacies, that is where I thrive. It is my life force. It is what keeps me alive, and I don't just mean financially—I immortalize myself by attaching myself to the literary legacies these people leave behind.

Chapter 5

The Ghostwritten Autobiography of Abraham Lincoln

The following is an excerpt from Living Life, the ghostwritten autobiography written by Abraham Lincoln's ghost. Lincoln's ghost recounts some of things he's been up to in his post-presidency/post-life.

In heaven, I don't wear a top hat, so you probably wouldn't recognize me up here. There's no use for hats in the afterlife. Back in my day on Earth, hats served a purpose—to keep the sun out of your eyes, or to disguise a receding hairline (and protect the newly-revealed skin from the sun). But because there is no ultraviolet radiation (or skin) in heaven, nobody needs hats.

Disregarding hats altogether, I would be unrecognizable on account that I simply do not have a body up here. Everybody loses their earthly flesh vessel after they die. In fact, everyone in heaven is a floating amorphous cloud. We all have the same gassy shape and there's no real way to physically tell anyone apart. All the gas clouds just float around and if you ever bump into someone, you might end up sharing pieces of your gas cloud. For example, I'm currently carrying around bits of gas cloud from a lady named Gwyneth after I bumped into her the other day.

Nobody cares about your past life up here. It doesn't matter if you grew up in a log cabin or were president of the United States during the

most turbulent period of American history. It's impossible to look impressive when the afterlife is filled with generations of people who did pretty amazing things. I mean, Whitney Houston is up here. She is awesome. "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" is one of the greatest songs in human history.

After having been dead for over 150 years, there is just one thing I would like to clear up regarding my legacy. Somewhere down the road after I died, I ended up getting the nickname "Honest Abe." While flattering, I just want to point out that this isn't true. To be quite honest, the nickname is, in fact, dishonest. We've all told a few lies in our lives. I'm just as culpable. I wanted to raise this point because I don't want to go down in history for some stupid name.

One of the cool things about the afterlife is that you can sometimes head down to Earth and visit every once in awhile. If you want to go down, you can only do it in *ghost mode*. You need special permission to do that because if everyone had access to *ghost mode*, Earth would be overrun with ghosts and that would scare everyone who's alive really bad. It would make Earth too spooky, and we don't want to blow our cover. So in order to visit earth, you have to get permission from the Ghost Bureau where they fit you in a ghost outfit. The outfit makes you

invisible and it gives you the ability to pass through walls. The technology isn't very advanced—it was last updated 3,000 years ago. You can only communicate through mumbled whispers.

Visiting Earth is a cool way to stay up-to-date on all of the new advancements on Earth since you died. Back on Earth, a lot of people question if ghosts even exist. We definitely exist! That's why it's fun to sometimes mess with people. Sometimes while on Earth I'll find a random person's bed to hang out underneath while they're trying to sleep and I'll shake the bed to scare the heck out of them! Most people think it's a sinister poltergeist that's trying to terrorize them. But no, it's just me, the 16th President of the United States, trying to have a little fun. Maybe if they knew it was me, the Great Emancipator, they wouldn't get so scared.

It's somewhat ironic because in heaven, you can't always do the things you enjoyed most while you were on Earth. For example, I loved to play handball when I was alive.⁴⁹ It was my favorite sport as an adolescent. In fact, my greatest regret is that I never played enough handball. Entering political life took a humongous toll on my handball

⁴⁹ Levinson, David, and Karen Christensen. "Abraham Lincoln: Handball Player." *Encyclopedia of World Sport: From Ancient times to the Present*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1996. 164.

life and that is time playing handball that I will never get back. Leading America through the Civil War and maintaining union of a country so deeply divided made it nearly impossible to play handball. One of the things I looked forward to most after my presidency was to finally have the time for personal hobbies, like playing handball. In fact, at the moment I was brutally shot in the head by John Wilkes Booth while watching *An American Cousin* at Ford's Theatre, I wasn't even paying attention to the play. I was actually daydreaming about playing handball. Now that I'm dead and in heaven, you would think I would have all of eternity to play handball. Unfortunately that is not the case because in heaven, physical objects, like balls (and hands), don't exist.

Chapter 6

John F. Kennedy's Mad Libs

For decades, many assumed JFK was the sole author of the 1957 Pulitzer Prize-winning book Profiles in Courage. As JFK's longtime aide and former speechwriter Ted Sorenson confessed in his 2008 autobiography Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History, he was the one who actually wrote a lot of the book. As he put it, he "did a first draft of most chapters" and "helped choose the words of many of its sentences," which is, arguably, the literal definition of writing a book. Sorenson's roundabout description of his involvement sounds a lot like the instructions for the popular fill-in-the-blank word game called Mad Libs. Inspired by Sorenson's description and the popular word game, what follows are a series of excerpts of famous JFK speeches, except they are written like Mad Libs, as if Sorenson prepared them for JFK to fill out.

1961 Inaugural Address

My fellow (plural nationality), ask not what your (place) can do for you, ask what you can do for your (place).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Kennedy, John F. "John F. Kennedy Inaugural Address." John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address. 20 Jan. 1961. Address.

Moon Speech at Rice University

We choose to go to the (space object). We choose to go to the (space object) in this (time frame) and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are (antonym for “easy”), because that goal will serve to (verb) and (verb) the best of our energies and (plural noun), because that challenge is one that we are willing to (verb), one we are unwilling to (verb), (conjunction) one which we intend to win, and the others, too.⁵¹

Cuban Missile Crisis Address

Good evening, my fellow (group of people). This Government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet (scary noun) buildup on the island of Cuba. Within the past (period of time), unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive (other scary noun) sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned (sub-continental land surrounded by water). The purpose of these (plural

⁵¹ Kennedy, John F. "Rice Stadium Moon Speech." Rice Stadium. 12 Sept. 1962. Speech.

place for putting scary nouns) can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the (cardinal direction) Hemisphere.⁵²

The size of this (noun) makes clear that it has been planned for some (period of time). Yet, only last month, after I had made clear the distinction between any introduction of ground-to-ground (nouns that kill a lot of people) and the existence of defensive anti-aircraft missiles, the Soviet Government publicly stated on September 11 that, and I quote, "the (plural noun) and military equipment sent to Cuba are designed exclusively for (adjective) purposes," that there is, and I quote the Soviet Government, "there is no need for the Soviet Government to shift its (nouns that kill a lot of people) for a retaliatory blow to any other country, for instance Cuba," and that, and I quote their government, "the Soviet Union has so powerful (plural noun) to carry these nuclear (plural noun) that there is no need to search for sites for them beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union." That statement was false.

"City Upon a Hill" Speech

Today the (plural body part) of all people are truly upon us—and our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local,

⁵² Kennedy, John F. "Cuban Missile Crisis Address to the Nation." 22 Oct. 1962. Speech.

must be as a (large, permanent human settlement) upon a (geographic feature)—constructed and inhabited by (plural animal) aware of their (adjective) trust and their (adjective) responsibilities.⁵³

⁵³ Kennedy, John F. "City Upon a Hill Speech." 9 Jan. 1961. Speech.

Chapter 7

The Time I Talked to Millard Fillmore

The ghost of Millard Fillmore once communicated with a couple of teenagers through an Ouija board. What follows is a written account about the encounter with the presidential phantasm. The following was published in the description section of an online change.org petition.

Okay, this might sound pretty crazy, but it's absolutely true. Last week, I went over to Jimmy's house because his older sister Christa bought a Ouija board without their parents knowing, and he wanted to try it out. I don't believe in ghosts or anything like that, so I wasn't scared to try it out. Jimmy was more of a wuss about it and I kept laughing at him at school. I told him that Ouija boards have magnets in them and that's why the pointer thing moves on the board. But after that night at Jimmy's house, all of my doubts about ghosts existing were destroyed after we connected with the ghost of the 13th President of the United States, Millard Fillmore.

It was nuts because I honestly did not think we would be connecting with any spirits that night, let alone the spirit of the president who succeeded 12th President of the United States Zachary Taylor. For about twenty minutes nothing was happening. We sat in Jimmy's room

with the Ouija board and nothing was moving. My theory about magnets in the board wasn't even holding up. Either Jimmy's sister Christa bought a board that didn't have magnets in it, or Ouija boards just didn't have magnets in them at all, and they were all a big scam. But nope, just as we were about to give up, the pointer thing slid over to the letter 'H' on the board.

At first we were both shocked because, what the heck, a ghost just reached out to us. We took our hands off the pointer thing super fast because we were freaked the heck out after it moved by itself. But then we put our hands back on it, and it slid over to the 'E'. We let it finish spelling out the message: "H E L L O I T I S M E P R E S I D E N T M I L L A R D F I L L M O R E".

I have to say, that moment really proved to me that ghosts exist. But then I became skeptical again. Even though this was a ghost reaching out to us from the spirit world, was it actually the ghost of Millard Fillmore, or was it a ghost that was just pretending to be Millard Fillmore? So I said out loud, "Prove it." And then the pointer thing spelled out, "W H Y W O U L D I L I E T O Y O U ?" Which, I guess, sort of made sense because the ghost already had our attention. He didn't have to lie about being the 13th president of the United States for us to pay attention to him.

So then Jimmy asked back, “Why are you here?” To which Millard Fillmore responded, “I H A V E A S P E C I A L M E S S A G E F O R T H E W H I T E H O U S E”. We were so confused. Did Millard Fillmore make a mistake, and accidentally contact our Ouija board thinking it was the White House? So I responded out loud, “This is not the White House.” And Fillmore messaged back, “O H S H I T,” paused for a second before spelling out, “S O R R Y W R O N G O U I J A B O A R D”.

At that point I wasn’t even spooked by the fact we were communicating with a ghost. This was a former United States president we were talking to, and he had just mistaken Jimmy’s house for the White House. Then Jimmy was like, “Wait does the White House have a Ouija board?”

“Y E S” was Fillmore’s response. “I T I S L O C A T E D I N T H E R O O S E V E L T R O O M”. The pointer thing stopped for a second. “Y O U S U R E T H I S I S N O T T H E R O O S E V E L T R O O M ?

“No, this is Jimmy’s room,” I said.

“A H W E L L T H E N I R E A L L Y M U S T G E T G O I N G I H A V E T O T A L K T O T H E P R E S I D E N T”.

“Is there any way we can help?” asked Jimmy.

“A C T U A L L Y Y E S Y O U C A N”

I won't try typing out everything he said because that'd take too much time and space, so I'll just describe what the pointer thing spelled out on the Ouija board. Basically, President Fillmore had recently found out that the official White House website, whitehouse.gov, labeled him as an "unsurprising" president. He also found out that many historians have grouped him among some of the worst presidents in history, which he found very unfair—especially when compared to presidents like Franklin Pierce and Herbert Hoover.

He asked us to start a petition to help polish his legacy. Here's the message he asked us to write down and include in the petition:

Dear Mr. President,

I have noticed throughout the last hundred or so years that many in these great states, from private citizens to renowned historians, regard me as one of the worst presidents in American history. I do not know how this could have happened. This is terribly

unfortunate that I have been relegated to the dustbin of history.

However, even though my legacy as the thirteenth President of the United States can be seen as lackluster, it is my legacy as a phantasm that can hopefully redeem any of my shortcomings while I was alive. I ask that you declassify my many accomplishments I

have achieved in the afterlife. As you obviously know, I have been a trusted ghostly aide to every sitting president since my death. After releasing this information, I am sure my status as an “okay” and “unsurprising” president will change.

Sincerely,

Millard Fillmore, 13th President of the United States/14th

Comptroller of New York

Before returning to the netherworld, President Fillmore also told us about the Ouija board in the Roosevelt Room. Apparently it has been around for 130 years. It was first purchased by President Grover Cleveland in 1886 and has been used by every sitting president to consult with ghosts of presidents’ past.

He mentioned how ghosts of presidents had been consulted with during a bunch of historical events, like the Wall Street crash of 1929, World War II, and, most recently, the Great Recession of 2008 (FDR sat in on meetings between President Obama and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner while hammering out TARP, though ghost-FDR’s suggestions of a New “New Deal” were never realized.)

Right after telling us all of these things, he told us that he had to go because he needed jump over to the White House Ouija board board to talk to Obama. And just like that, the pointer thing stopped moving.

So many things happened that night that completely rattled my brain. Not only did I turn from ghost denier to ghost believer, but I also learned that presidents have been meddling with politics and world affairs even after they die. So with all that being said, you can sign this petition if you think President Obama should release all the information about President Fillmore's post-presidential/post-life work.

Last I checked, the petition had gathered seven signatures after eight months of being public.

Conclusion

An Attachment

The following is a letter that was sent to Professor Hutchison and Professor Woodruff, the supervisors of this thesis.

Dear Professors Hutchison and Woodruff,

My name is Joel Spicer, and I'm a freelance writer in Austin, Texas. I am reaching out to you because, through some research, I discovered that you are affiliated with Xavier Rotnofsky, and that you both play supervisory roles on the thesis he recently submitted. I'm sorry if this is a weird letter for you all to be receiving, but I have no one else to turn to.

I'm actually the one who wrote the thesis. It was all me. All the research and stories—I wrote it all. I am sorry to break this news to you. I would not be revealing this information to you if I were not in such a desperate situation. This goes against everything I stand for as a ghostwriter, but ultimately Xavier has violated our contract and he hasn't paid me for my work.

I suppose I should've paid more attention to Xavier's unusual behavior before it got to this point. But I was so desperate for work that I let it all slide. A few months ago, I responded to Xavier's ad on Craigslist calling for a thesis ghostwriter. I've attached a screenshot of the

Craigslist ad, so you can take a look. Within minutes, he responded to my email and hired me right then. He didn't even ask for samples of my previous work or my credentials, both of which I have plenty of, by the way. I just found it surprising that he didn't even attempt to vet me before giving me the job.

We got together a couple of times to talk about the thesis. On the first meeting, he told me about the concept of the thesis, which I thought was cute, but a little heavyhanded. We also agreed on a price and I signed a non-disclosure agreement, which I am obviously breaking with this letter. He agreed to pay \$1,000 per page, meaning he owes me a \$60,000.

He ceased all communication with me soon after I emailed him the final version of thesis. Every time I call him, it goes straight to voicemail. And since last week, my emails have been bouncing back with error messages telling me that the email address doesn't exist. That's weird because it's the same email address I used to contact him prior to last week. I can only assume he has since deleted his email account, which went by the address xavier_hot_boy94@aol.net.

I've done these sorts of projects before. Besides writing my own undergraduate thesis, I also wrote two other undergraduate theses and a

Ph.D. dissertation, all while I was still an undergraduate. I've also done a number of master's theses and I tutor calculus on the side. Of all the academic projects I have worked on and people whom I have worked with, Xavier has been the single worst client I have ever had the misfortune of dealing with. Of course, I think the work that I did for him is A+ quality, but Xavier, as a human, deserves to get a fat F. But that is beside the point because, ultimately, I don't care what grade he gets so long as I get my money.

I guess someone who is so willing to break academic integrity is also someone who would be willing to break a contract and keep me from my money. Xavier is quite literally ghosting me. *Ghosting* is slang for "suddenly ceasing all communication with someone," and it's terribly ironic how this applies, given the context of Xavier's stupid thesis concept. I enjoy a good pun every once in awhile, but it is impossible to find humor in any of this because I am currently owed \$60,000 for a thesis that has ruined my life.

I've lost sleep and weight—and I've lost any semblance of basic hygiene. Any time I would send Xavier a draft, he would be unhappy with it and request a rewrite. I ended up rewriting the thesis from scratch a total of seventeen (17) times. I owe two months of rent and I can't even

remember the last time I bought groceries. I have been sustaining myself solely on bread that I dip into some hummus and mayonnaise. Also, while writing this godforsaken thesis, my girlfriend dumped me after I found out she was cheating on me with Xavier. At this point, all I want is my money. I may not get the life I once had back, but at least I can regain some financial stability, god willing.

I'm sorry to be putting you two in such an awkward position, but if Xavier doesn't come through with the \$60,000 in the next two weeks, then I can only assume that the debt transfers to you two. I'm not entirely sure how ownership works, but as thesis supervisors, I assume you all become the owners of the thesis once it's turned in. And if not to you all, then it must belong to the Plan 2 Program. And if not the Plan 2 Program, then I assume it is property of the University of Texas. I've sent copies of this letter along to Dr. Michael Stoff and President Gregory Fenves.

Please help me figure out what I need to do. If you can get in contact with him, let him know I am looking for my money.

You all have two weeks to get me my \$60,000, whether that comes from him, you, Plan 2, or the University. I hope we can remedy this without much more trouble than has already been caused.

Sincerely,

Joel Spicer

The screenshot shows a web browser window with multiple tabs. The active tab is titled 'Looking for a ghostwriter' and displays a Craigslist listing. The browser's address bar shows 'austin.craigslist.org/wrg/5827844950.html'. The page header includes navigation links like 'How-to DJ', 'Open Casting Call', and various social media icons. The listing itself has a title '★ Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis' with a shield icon. Below the title, the text reads: 'Hey! Do you know how to write? Great! Do you know how to read? I assume so if you've gotten to this point. I'd love to hire you! I'm looking for someone who can write my undergraduate thesis. That might sound illegal, but I assure you: it's fine. I will pay a handsome amount for your services. Thank you, Xavier'. A bulleted note states: 'do NOT contact me with unsolicited services or offers'. To the right of the text is a map of Austin, Texas, with a purple circle highlighting a specific area. Below the map, a compensation field is labeled 'compensation: So much money (yum!)'. At the bottom of the listing, it shows 'post id: 5827844950', 'posted: 2 minutes ago', and links for 'email to friend' and 'best of'.

replied prohibited [?] Posted 2 minutes ago print

★ Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis [shield icon]

Hey!

Do you know how to write? Great! Do you know how to read? I assume so if you've gotten to this point. I'd love to hire you!

I'm looking for someone who can write my undergraduate thesis. That might sound illegal, but I assure you: it's fine. I will pay a handsome amount for your services.

Thank you,
Xavier

- do NOT contact me with unsolicited services or offers

map

compensation: So much money (yum!)

post id: 5827844950 posted: 2 minutes ago email to friend best of [?]

(Screenshot of the ad Xavier posted to Craigslist)

Final Thoughts

After taking a look at the business of ghostwriting, I thought about some of the ethical questions that arise from taking credit for somebody else's work. Is it okay to take the credit when you're paying for it? If so, then does that mean they don't need to be acknowledged at all? Many published books give the illusion that the name on the book cover is the sole author regardless of their involvement in the writing process.

It seems to also water down the accomplishment of those authors who have written books by themselves. If we are to assume that post-political autobiographies and memoirs are written by teams of writers, then it takes away from those who played a more primary role in the process. Bill Clinton wrote his autobiography himself. As I mentioned in the first chapter, he handwrote twenty notebooks worth of text. Compare that to Ronald Reagan, who handed off the job to a close aide. It seems wrong to hold the two books under the same regard.

Another interesting conundrum ghostwriting seems to bump against arises when you think about taking credit for someone else's work in an academic setting. Known as plagiarism, that is a big no-no in college. A student who plagiarizes could face failing grades and even expulsion. So at what point is it okay to take credit for work that isn't yours? Perhaps it's fine when money is involved. Though, that's not quite

the case. It would still be bad if a college student paid someone else to do their work for them.

That was the point of the letter I wrote to my thesis supervisors from the perspective of the Craigslist writer who allegedly wrote my entire thesis for me. In fact, the Craigslist ad that I attached to the letter is a real ad. I actually posted the ad to Craigslist to see if it would actually get responses. I thought it was so asinine and badly written that people wouldn't bite, but to my surprise, I got over sixty emails in response.

Each person was willing to write the thesis for me, even though it would be breaking many academic rules. They were willing to violate them as long as they got paid. I have attached a series of screenshots of these emails. I have chosen to redact their email information in order to hide the identities of the writers who emailed me because the topic the controversial nature of this topic. I would hate to out anyone who responded to my ad, which I posted in jest not thinking people would actually respond.

The amount of credibility the writers tried to establish in their emails varied. Most laid out their credentials and listed previous projects they had ghostwritten. They included C.V.s and some even attached customer testimonials. Though, on the other hand, some weren't as thorough in establishing themselves as credible ghostwriters. One writer

opened up his short email with: “I’m an outstanding writer. Philosophy major undergrad with a minor in economics and recent graduate of UT Law. So rest assured, I can write.”

Looking for a ghostwriter to write my **thesis**



Thu 11/3, 7:47 AM

scd49-5827844950@gigs.craigslist.org



Reply | v

<http://austin.craigslist.org/wrg/5827844950.html>

I'm an outstanding writer. Philosophy major undergrad with a minor in economics and recent graduate of UT Law. So rest assured, I can write. What's the topic? And compensation? Writing samples available upon request.

The age range varied among the respondents. One writer noted that she had ten years of experience writing academic papers, master’s theses, and dissertations. However, I even got responses from people who claimed they were still undergraduates. One person even told me that, beside his own undergraduate thesis, he had written two others, as well. In terms of customer satisfaction he said, “Both were happy with their grades.” Some of the writers who reached out to me even included a list grades for previous theses they worked on. One of them promised that he would get me an A. He stated, “I guarantee an A in my work. No plagiarism!” which was a bold claim to make without having much

context for what he needed to do.

Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis



Wed 10/19, 5:02 AM
scd49-5827844950@gigs.craigslist.org

Reply

Hello Sir/Madam,

I am an experienced academic writer, well versed in the use of various referencing styles (APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard etc.). I guarantee an A in my work. No plagiarism!

Many of the writers listed the different kinds of academic papers they have worked on, which included class papers, undergraduate theses, master's theses, and even Ph.D. dissertations. If what they said was true, I am most surprised that Ph.D. candidates would utilize ghostwriters to write their dissertations, which seems to contradict the very reason for getting a doctorate degree. Getting a master's degree or PhD implies that you are, well, a master in the field that you are studying. If you are unable to author the formal document that demonstrates comprehension and mastery of a subject, then what does that say about your ability to be an authority on the subject?

Whichever reasons a thesis ghostwriter would give to justify the act, he or she is very much aware that it is against the rules. One writer who provided ample evidence and testimony to his ability was careful not to reveal his previous clients. Though he did offer client testimonials, but redacted any information regarding the client. That raises separate

issues about credibility, too. For example, how do I know he didn't write the testimonials himself? There is no way to verify his clients' claims. Perhaps he even ghostwrote the testimonials. I received an email from another writer who was more succinct and honest with his response. He wrote back simply with: "Hi. I am short on both morals and money and interested in hearing more about your offer."

Given that the Craigslist ad I posted had very little information, I was surprised by the confidence many of these writers displayed regarding their ability to write extensively about a subject I had never even mentioned in the ad. They were quick to offer their services, even though my ad was purposely vague and sketchy. One writer even claimed that he could write the thesis over the weekend.

Even though on the Craigslist ad I stated that I would pay a "handsome amount," some writers gave me quotes estimating how much they would charge. One writer asked for \$300 to \$400 dollars. Another writer from Australia stated that he charged ten dollars U.S. dollars per page, which means this thesis would have cost me roughly sixty dollars if I decided to contract his services. Most of the people who emailed asked to be paid through PayPal, or in the Australian's case, a direct money

transfer to his Australian bank account.

Thesis Writer



Wed 10/19, 8:35 AM

scd49-5827844950@gigs.craigslist.org



Reply

Hello, Kindly contact me back directly at [REDACTED] if you are still looking for a professional writer for your thesis. I am a dissertation, thesis and essay writer from Australia and I believe I can give you the best in your thesis. My charges are only 10usd per page payable through paypal or direct transfer to my Australian bank account.
Kind regards

I attempted to delve a little deeper into this newfound world of Craigslist writers-for-hire. I replied to one writer who wrote me a thorough email listing out his areas of expertise, credentials as an academic ghostwriter, and grade reports. I sent him a few questions. You can see my response below and his subsequent reply, too. I want to note how he differentiates plagiarism from the act of taking credit for someone else's work as if they are two separate things. On the one hand, he abhors plagiarism, citing the fact that he is a journalist and he takes it very seriously. Yet on the other hand, he points out that if I were to be caught, I would technically get in trouble for violating "academic integrity". He points out that I could potentially not receive credit for the course or perhaps even get expelled. It appears that he is removing himself from the act of plagiarism. In terms of the writing process, he promises that he won't steal someone else's work. However, that

wouldn't necessarily remove me from the misdeed since I would technically taking his writing and passing it off as my own. It as if we would be playing hot potato with the tag of "plagiarist."

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, October 14, 2016 8:43 AM
To: scd49-5827844950@gigs.craigslist.org
Subject: Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis

I've written papers and theses for undergraduate and masters students, but due to concerns about academic integrity, my former clients who I've assisted can't over testimonials.

I do have references from other writing and editing clients, many of whom found me via Craigslist, and they are attached along with my CV and freelance credits.

My academic writing work consistently earned B-plus to A grades.

Contact me if you'd like to discuss further.

(His email)

On 10/16/16 3:22 PM, craigslist 5827844950 wrote:

Thanks for the reply, Rob.

I have a few questions. How many academic papers have you done in the past? Also, what's the process for making sure that there's no overlap with previous academic writing and risk of plagiarism? I'm curious, what are the potential legal repercussions? Also, how much do you usually charge?

Thanks,
X

(My response)

Re: Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis



Mon 10/17, 7:11 AM



Reply | v

Dear 'X,'

In answer to your questions:

- Between the two graduate students I was working with, somewhere around 20-25. Plus I wrote a paper for a client who had dropped out of the University of Oklahoma some 25 years ago a few credits shy of a degree. The paper earned him his degree. About 10/12 years ago I also did some editing and rewriting on a doctorate thesis for a friend that was on the faculty at a Canadian university.

Or if you go by my quip that being a writer is a lot like being in college – research a topic and then write something on it – but instead of paying for it one gets paid, many many hundreds.

- Any paper I would write for you would be a wholly original work. As a journalist, I must be on guard to avoid plagiarism all the time.

You would get a ready-to-submit paper done in the specified academic style.

- There are no legal repercussions, per se. The risks if the paper were discovered to not be your work – the term used is "academic integrity" – would be not getting course credit and possible expulsion.

- It is impossible for me to even give you a rough estimate of cost without knowing the length of the paper, subject, deadline and how much reading and research I would have to do for it.

Call if you have further questions.

(His response)

Money can't be the factor that separates legal ghostwriting from plagiarism. Paying someone else to do your work is still not allowed. Perhaps it simply depends on the rules. In academia, it's not allowed to get someone else to ghostwrite your homework. In political book writing, it is allowed. The difference of course is that in an academic setting the student is expected to learn from the homework he or she is assigned. How can they learn if they aren't doing the work? In professional ghostwriting, the client isn't learning anything. The client's purpose is to sell a book while growing the politician's influence.

While it is fine for politicians to get teams of writers to author their political volumes, it is not okay for me to hire someone to do my homework. The goals are different. Hiring ghostwriters will help politicians achieve their goal of expanding their influence, while minimizing the workload they are required to do. Hiring ghostwriters to write a thesis, however, would not help me achieve the goal of writing a thesis: to learn about a topic and to learn how to write about it. Though, given the thesis topic I chose and style in which I wrote it, hopefully I also gained the skills and ability to one day be hired as a ghostwriter myself.

Looking for a ghostwriter to write my thesis



Tue 10/18, 2:03 AM

scd49-5827844950@gigs.craigslist.org

Hi. I am short on both morals and money and interested in hearing more about your offer.

<http://austin.craigslist.org/wrg/5827844950.html>

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Biography

Xavier Rotnofsky was born in Austin, Texas on June 1, 1994, and grew up in Laredo, Texas. He enrolled in the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2012. While at UT, Xavier studied abroad in Costa Rica and participated in the Normandy Scholars Program. He was also an active writer and editor for the school's humor publication, *Texas Travesty*. During the 2015-2016 school year, Xavier served as the student body president. At the end of his fourth year, he helped start a hot sauce company, and relocated to Los Angeles, California.